

CLAIM AMENDMENTS:

Please cancel claims 5, 6, 15, and 16 and amend claims 1, 3, 7, 8, 12, 13, and 17 so that the pending claim set reads as follows:

--1. (currently amended) A guard for covering the union of mating first and second shafts that extend from respective first and second bell housings and that are rotatable about and relatively telescopic along a shaft axis, the guard comprising:

an inner guard sleeve extending along the shaft axis and linked to the first bell housing;

an outer guard sleeve extending along the shaft axis radially outside of the inner guard sleeve and linked to the second bell housing; and

a center guard sleeve extending along the shaft axis radially between the inner and outer guard sleeves, the center guard sleeve being overlapped by the outer guard sleeve and overlapping the inner guard sleeve along the shaft axis and being biased axially toward one of the inner and outer guard sleeves so as to move axially in response to telescopic movement and bridge any gap between the ends of the inner and outer guard ~~sleeves~~ sleeves;

wherein the center guard sleeve is slideably linked to one of the inner and outer guard sleeves;

wherein the center guard is linked in a tab and slot retention arrangement.

2. (original) The guard of claim 1, further comprising a spring acting against the center guard sleeve and one of the inner and outer guard sleeves.

3. (currently amended) The guard of claim 2, wherein the spring acts against the ~~inner guard sleeve to bias~~ biases the center guard sleeve axially toward the outer guard sleeve.

4. (original) The guard of claim 3, wherein the inner guard sleeve includes a radial end piece and the center guard sleeve includes a radial end piece, and wherein the spring is axially disposed between the end pieces.

5. (canceled)

6. (canceled)

7. (currently amended) The guard of ~~claim 6~~ claim 1, wherein the center guard sleeve is linked to the inner guard sleeve and biased toward the outer guard sleeve.

8. (currently amended) A guard for covering the union of mating first and second shafts that are rotatable about and relatively telescopic along a shaft axis, the guard comprising:

an inner guard sleeve extending along the shaft axis;

an outer guard sleeve extending along the shaft axis radially outside of the inner guard sleeve; and

a center guard sleeve extending along the shaft axis radially between the inner and outer guard sleeves, the center guard sleeve being overlapped by the outer guard sleeve and overlapping the inner guard sleeve along the shaft axis and being biased axially toward one of the inner and outer guard sleeves so as to move axially in response to telescopic movement of the first and second shafts so as to bridge any gap between the ends of the inner and outer guard sleeves, wherein the center guard sleeve is slideably linked to one of the inner and outer guard sleeves to the inner guard sleeve by a tab and slot retention arrangement, which includes a tab extending radially inward and received by an axially extending slot.

9. (previously presented) The guard of claim 8, wherein the tab has a section of a width greater than a width of the slot.

10. (original) The guard of claim 8, wherein the tab is integral with the center guard sleeve.

11. (previously presented) The guard of claim 1, wherein at least one guard sleeve is co-axial with the shaft axis.

12. (currently amended) A guard for covering the union of two rotating shafts movable in telescoping relation through a travel distance along a shaft axis, the guard comprising:

two bell housings for covering portions of the shafts; and

inner, center and outer guard sleeves disposed along the shaft axis between the bell housings, the center guard sleeve being radially between the inner and outer guard sleeves in axially overlapping relation and being spring-biased to maintain the overlap between the center guard sleeve and both of the inner and outer guard sleeves throughout the travel distance of the shafts: shafts;

wherein the center guard sleeve is slideably linked to the inner guard sleeve;

wherein the center guard is biased toward the outer guard sleeve and linked in a tab and slot retention arrangement to the inner guard sleeve.

13. (currently amended) The guard of claim 12, further including a spring and wherein the spring ~~acts against the inner guard sleeve to bias~~ biases the center guard sleeve axially toward the outer guard sleeve.

14. (original) The guard of claim 13, wherein the inner guard sleeve includes a radial end piece and the center guard sleeve includes a radial end piece, and wherein the spring is axially disposed between the end pieces.

15. (canceled)

16. (canceled)

17. (currently amended) A guard for covering the union of two rotating shafts movable in telescoping relation through a travel distance along a shaft axis, the guard comprising: inner, center and outer guard sleeves disposed along the shaft axis, the center guard sleeve being radially between the inner and outer guard sleeves in axially overlapping relation and being biased by a spring to maintain the overlap between the center guard sleeve and both of the inner and outer guard sleeves throughout the travel distance of the shafts, wherein the center guard sleeve is slideably linked to one of the inner and outer guard sleeves to the inner guard sleeve in a tab and slot retention arrangement, which includes an integral tab extending radially inward and received by an axially extending slot.

18. (previously presented) The guard of claim 17, wherein the tab has a section of a width greater than a width of the slot.

19. (original) The guard of claim 12, wherein the guard sleeves are concentric with the shaft axis.--